

## The Birmingham News

### Ian Thompson - Golf World magazine ranks Robert Trent Jones Trail's Opelika Grand National No. 1 in country

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The Robert Trent Jones Trail has received many accolades through the years, but some recent kudos from Golf World, a leading weekly national periodical, may be hard to beat.



IAN THOMPSON

In its first readers poll, published in its Oct. 17 issue, Grand National in Opelika was ranked No. 1 in the country. Capitol Hill in Prattville was No. 2. Magnolia Grove in Mobile also cracked the top 50 at No. 32. These were the only public golf facilities in the state that were listed.

A series of criteria were used in the online poll that totaled more than 21,000 individual course ratings and more than 252,000 criteria evaluations, according to Geoff Russell, editor-in-chief of Golf World.

Grand National, with an overall score of 89.86, scored particularly high in value, course conditions and overall amenities. Capitol Hill scored 89.58, with its highest rating for course quality.

"The Trail has always been known for great golf and value," said David Bronner, CEO of the Retirement Systems of Alabama, which financed the Trail. "With rankings like these and being named the top golf value destination in the country this year by Golf Digest, we hope to introduce even more people to golf in Alabama."

The Trail has received countless honors since the first facilities opened in 1992, including recognition in Golf Digest, Golf Magazine, Golf World, Golfweek, and U.S. News and World Report.

The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Boston Herald have all visited and been impressed.

#### **Oxmoor instructor:**

Neil Thompson, a Class A member of both the PGA of America and the PGA of Great Britain and Ireland, was recently named the director of instruction at Oxmoor Valley's Golf Academy.

He has been teaching golf students of all ages and abilities since 1993 and currently teaches members of the Nationwide, Asian, Futures and Hooters Tours. He is a Level III golf professional member of the TPI (Titleist Performance Institute), which combines the world of golf with health and physical fitness information for elite player development.

He runs multiple clinics, with his junior clinics on Saturday afternoons among the most popular.

He hails from England and attended Central Alabama Community College, where he was a first-team All-American and won at local and national levels.

He has previously taught at Tannehill National, Chace Lake, Capstone Club and Deer Valley.

He recently won the Dixie Section's Nike Match Play Championship, beating Bryan McMurray, Ricky Smallridge, defending champion Pope Spruiell, Eric Williamson and then Steve Sims in the final.

He finished tied for third in the Callaway Alabama Chapter Championship, won by Country Club of Birmingham teaching pro Jeff Jordan in a playoff over Troy Raybon of Inverness Country Club.